Course Materials Cost Reduction Presidential Task Force Report

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Course Material Cost Reduction Task Force
FROM: Daniel J. Bernardo  
       Interim President
DATE: March 11, 2016
SUBJECT: Presidential Task Force

As you know, a significant contributor to the cost of a college education is the rising cost of course materials, such as required textbooks, student response systems, and access codes. In collaboration with the Associated Students of Washington State University, I am requesting your service on the Presidential Task Force to Reduce the Cost of Course Materials.

The Task Force, to be chaired by Rebecca Van de Vord, Special Assistant to the Provost for Student Success, is tasked with providing its initial report to me by May 15th on the nature of the problem and opportunities and challenges for its solution. University staff will research issues as needed throughout the summer, and the task force will reconvene in the fall to develop and propose action steps.

Meetings will be scheduled every 2 weeks beginning with the first meeting being on March 23rd at 1:00 PM. Please let Angela Merrill (awight@wsu.edu) know by March 17th if you cannot participate.
B. WSU Students' Course Materials Cost Reduction Initiative
Course Material Cost Reduction Initiative

Associated Students of Washington State University

Mission Statement:

Washington State University is a Tier 1 research institution, heralded for its collaborative learning environment, community integration, and opportunities for future success that have spanned the last 125 years. Attending Washington State University is an educational investment that is beyond comparison. As a part of this, over the past 100 years, the Associated Students of Washington State University have represented student interests, needs, and welfare on issues affecting student life. It is because of this responsibility we speak candidly in hopes of correcting the most common grievances presented by our constituents.

The cost of college education has skyrocketed over the last decade. This not only includes tuition; a large portion of this is the resources and materials required by nearly all courses. The proliferation of textbook prices, course fees, access codes, iClickers, and other BYOD instructional formats have become a problem for the current generations of students. This is heightened by the inability to sell back textbooks and other materials. Over the past few years, ASWSU has made various attempts to curtail additional course material fees, but has made little progress for a number of reasons. For starters, our organization functions primarily as an advocacy group in terms of policy direction, creating awareness of problems to faculty and administration. Due to this, we lack an ability to implement large-scale initiatives which require numerous parties such as, the Bookie, Departments, Colleges, Faculty, and the Administration. Secondly, many of our attempts have gone unnoticed and often are rendered ineffective. This is not due to the lack of participation of any particular party. In fact, when approached, all parties have been receptive of change, but identifying the issue has been a problem in itself. Failure to identify the problem has led to our collective inability to delegate responsibility, thus hindering a solution. There is no particular party to blame, because it involves so many actors. Therefore, we find it necessary that student affordability be investigated holistically, through collaboration and communication. It is because of this we strongly believe action had to be taken. Our primary goal is to address the problem of rising course material costs on students at Washington State University. In order to reach our goal, it will take organized communication among all the parties involved, and require our institution to formulate viable solutions that will reduce these costs on students.

We alone are not capable of addressing this issue by ourselves. Thus, we would like to present grievances explained by our constituents, demonstrate the work we have done so far, and illustrate opportunities for change we believe possible. With the participation of the Bookie, Faculty, Administration, President’s Office, Provost Office, and Board of Regents, we believe WSU can make a big change, and in turn incentive future students to attend a university actively searching for ways to help its students.

Sincerely,

Associated Students of Washington State University
Textbooks and Course Materials as a National Problem:
- According to NBC's review of Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data, textbook prices have risen 3 times the inflation rate from January 1977 to June 2015, more than 1,000%
- According to College Board, the average estimated cost of books and supplies is $1,290, with "other" expenses estimated at $2,106 (College Board.com)
- A 2014 PIRGs study found that 65% of students had skipped buying or renting a textbook because it was too expensive, and 94% of those students felt doing so would hurt their grade in the course.

How does this relate to WSU-Pullman?
The rising costs of textbooks have been an easily-identifiable problem for most students, but certain aspects are perpetuated by our inability to combat the issue. Throughout the year, ASWSU has been working diligently to understand where students are having problems. Ranging from ASWSU's umbrella committee involvement, daily interactions with other student organizations, and social media campaigns, like DearWSU, our organization actively engages with students in many ways to better understand their interests and needs. During such programs, we have identified that "course material costs" are one of the greatest areas of concern to students. Below, is a list of specific problems on-going at the WSU-Pullman campus.

Issues WSU Student's Face:
- **Purchasing new textbooks:**
  - Students fear the benefits of buying a new textbook do not outweigh the cost.
  - They run the risk of not being able to sell the textbook back at the end of the year for a multitude of reasons (Faculty submission, newer editions, Bookie not selling next semester).
  - Students would rather spend time finding the information online for free, if at all possible, than spend money on a textbook.
  - If a book is not required, students will avoid purchasing in order to save money even if it may benefit their overall grade. This is also a common occurrence for required textbooks if the students think they can get by without the textbook.
- **Purchasing Textbook Bundles:**
  - Even if a student has the means to obtain the textbook from a peer, they are often unable to do so because of textbook and homework bundles.
- **Purchasing Used/Rented Textbooks:**
  - There is a lack of availability for certain courses, requiring students to purchase the new textbook.
- **Purchasing Mediums for Instruction:**
  - In order to meet attendance requirements, it is often required that students purchase an iClicker or access code for a particular course.
  - Students will often pay for multiple instruction resources for different classes.
  - iClicker is mostly used, but costs roughly $60 per device and is typically purchased multiple times over a 4 year period.
  - iClicker, being the primary instruction resource, offers an alternative online format (REEF Polling), and if used, requires a separate purchase.
- Alternative online instruction resources are also available at lower prices.

  - **Lack of Resource Availability:**
    - Availability of FREE open-source material.
    - There is no identifiable department on campus primarily focused on course material costs for students, making it difficult to address the problem.
    - Lack of departmental coordination.
      - No general plan for most, which articulates what textbook to expect if they wished to prepare ahead of time (while a peer was taking the course).
      - Diverse textbook selection for introductory courses within certain departments, leaving students with little to no resale value after purchasing.
      - Multiple textbooks for the same sections of certain introductory classes: Each professor uses a different textbook, but the courses are still the same on transcripts.
    - No online resource for WSU which shows the availability of less expensive editions of the textbook (i.e. ISBN number)

**ASWSU’s Progress Thus Far:**

**Cost Awareness Campaign**

Dating back to fall of 2015, ASWSU Executive Staff members began investigating ways to improve college affordability for students. Initial conversations primarily concerned students being able to sell back their purchased textbooks to the Bookie. In coordination with staff in the Provost Office, Bookie, and Faculty members, we attempted to improve the promptness of textbook submission dates by making sure deadlines were clear and faculty was aware. With the awareness campaign, we were able to present the problems students were having to Faculty members surrounding affordability issues. Unsurprisingly, there were issues beyond surface level that were portrayed by the Faculty. The experience helped us better understand that there is no particular group at fault, rather it is the bureaucratic complexity of a large organization, such as WSU, which can make it difficult to pinpoint specific inefficiencies. After numerous discussion about the topic we came to the understanding that WSU Faculty is generally concerned with the problem, and they want to do whatever possible to help as long as it does not jeopardize their ability to instruct their class freely. Likewise, administrators and staffers in the Bookie shared their interest. Overall, WSU has been very receptive, but each group seems to maintain a narrow perspective which only focuses on a minor issue related to their group, making large scale institutional changes difficult.

**#DearWSU – Social Media Campaign**

Moreover, the Director of Communication for ASWSU continued their #DearWSU campaign on twitter. The goal of the event is to generate feedback from students on topics which concern a majority of the undergraduate population. The campaign lasts two weeks, with each day centered on a topic presented from ASWSU social media. College affordability topics, including textbooks, fees, iClickers, and course material prices, lasted about three days. The responses were eye-opening, and generated some of the highest responses over the two week
period. The DearWSU campaign provided a better understanding of student perspectives, and ultimately became the catalyst for our stance today.

Legislative Affairs – Coug Day at the Capitol
ASWSU has been maintaining a presence in Olympia, lobbying on behalf of bills supporting college affordability. This January, WSU students traveled to Olympia for our annual Coug Day at the Capitol event to meet with State Legislators. We lobbied in support of Washington State House Bill 2680 by Rep. Melanie Stambaugh (R-25) to establish an incentive program for professors to create open source material for their courses instead of requiring a textbook.

- ASWSU Senate passes Resolution 45-05
  - “Resolution in Support of Washington State Bill 2680”

Institutional Cost-Reduction Strategies Nationwide:

CSU’s Affordable Learning Solutions Initiative

- About:
  - CSU’s Affordable Learning Solutions enables faculty to choose and provide more affordable, quality educational content for their students.
  - By reducing CSU student course material expenses, more students acquire the course materials they need to succeed and benefit from their CSU learning experience.
  - Now, CSU faculty and students have greater access to quality free and low-cost learning materials through a variety of ALS programs and partnerships.

- Website & Resources: [www.affordablelearningsolutions.org](http://www.affordablelearningsolutions.org)
  - Enables faculty to find quality free or low-cost course content that can substitute for more costly textbooks.
  - Showcases the use of campus library resources for course materials.
  - Organizes tools for faculty to customize and author course content.
  - Provides easy access to information about usability and accessibility of e-readers.
  - Helps faculty be recognized for quality teaching and efforts to reduce students’ costs.
  - Enables faculty to share best practices for using low-cost digital and print content in CSU courses.
  - Supports campus Affordable Learning Solutions strategies and initiatives.

Minnesota Office of Higher Education

- About:
  - In 2007, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education produced a report on strategies for reducing textbook prices, with advice from a task force representing bookstores, students, faculty, publishers and others. The report is available online at www.ohe.state.mn.us under “Reports”.

- Strategies for Bookstores and Department Heads
  - Develop automated, online and easily accessible textbook information for faculty.
  - Enable faculty to place orders online and provide clear deadlines.
  - Provide price information to faculty.
o Assist faculty in planning negotiations with publishers for reduced prices.
  o Determine the availability of less expensive editions of textbooks (e.g., printed on less expensive paper or without color) and provide this information to faculty.
  o When student registration is complete, e-mail students the ISBN of the textbooks required for the course, thereby giving students the option to purchase textbooks online.
  o Explore ways that departmental coordination could reduce costs for students. Departments could consider using a standard book for all sections of introductory level courses so that used books will have more resale value.
  o Facilitate regular communications among bookstore managers, department heads, students and faculty

Open Textbooks: The Billion Dollar Solution – The Student PIRGs
  • PDF Link:
  • Summary:
    o The report depicts the rising cost of textbooks and the effect it has had on student’s purchasing course material. Additionally it offers short and long-term solutions to the problem by breaking down various Open Educational Resource (OER) strategies similar public institutions have implemented.
    o Open textbooks are faculty-written, peer-reviewed textbooks that are published under an open license—meaning that they are available free online, free to download, and print copies are available at $10-40, or approximately the cost of printing.
    o According to the report, they predict that when a traditional print textbook for an introductory level course is replaced with OER and open textbooks, a student saves approximately $128 per course, per semester.
      - Open Education Initiative; University of Massachusetts, Amherst
      - Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative; Kansas State University
      - OER Project; Tacoma Community College
      - Open Textbook Library; University of Minnesota
The Proposed Solution:
Under careful consideration, ASWSU is recommending the changes below to help curtail the rising cost of course material.

1) Develop a University Taskforce to investigate and implement effective cost reduction strategies.
   a. Members:
      i. Include representatives from all members on campus—students, faculty, department chairs, Bookie staff members, and any other administrative actors associated with the area.

   b. Objectives:
      i. Analyze student costs pertaining to all course materials (i.e. textbook prices, mediums of instruction, access codes, and course bundles).
      ii. Investigate organizational procedures surrounding textbook purchases; includes online information available for faculty and ordering procedures, communication between faculty and Bookie, availability of low-cost resources, and long-term strategies to recycle used textbooks within departments.
      iii. Investigate methods used by other institutions across the nations which seek to reduce the cost of course materials, including but not limited to, open-source availability, online resources for lower cost options, negotiations with textbooks companies, price-matching in student bookstore, and other available solutions.
      iv. Implement changes which seek to enhance communication among involved parties, reduce the cost of course material, and enhance student’s availability of learning resources.

   c. *** We believe this to be the most important aspect. If we are able to develop a taskforce with the means to achieve these goals, while providing an organized format to communicate, we will be able to introduce improvements which require the attention of numerous parties.

*Listed below are specific resolutions. Although we support the list below, we understand the importance of analyzing a decision with such a large impact. The suggestions should be considered as a framework for the committee to investigate and decide upon following careful consideration.

2) Introduce an open-source program.
   a. Many universities nation-wide have began investigating an open-source program rewarding grants for faculty members to compile open-source course materials.

   b. As state legislators have become more keenly aware of the situation, we believe this could be an area to take advantage of.

3) Educate: Faculty, Administration, and Students on means to reduce the cost of textbooks and other course material.
   a. Adding a “course materials” section of the instructor evaluations at the end of the semester that would be reviewed by the Department.
b. Develop automated, online and easily accessible textbook information with clear deadlines listed and enforced.

c. Introduce an organized system from each department focused on recycling textbooks for a determined period of time.
   i. This would increase availability of used textbooks and increase opportunities to sell back textbooks.

4) Eliminate additional costs of instructional resources (iClicker, TopHAT, REEF Polling, etc).
   a. Standardize a uniform instructional resource in order to eliminate multiple purchases for students each semester.
   b. Move toward subsidizing cost of selected instructional resource.
      i. Consider using Student Technology Fee.

Summary:

The goal of the Associated Students of Washington State University is to improve college affordability for future and prospective students by reducing the burden students pay each semester for course materials. A committee chiefly focused on identifying these issues, evaluating viable solutions, and implementing effective change, will be the enormous first step for the institution as a whole. Such change would exemplify Washington State University’s commitment to its students, while also providing an incentive for prospective students to attend an institution focused on making college an attainable and affordable experience. We are reaching out with hopes that this initiative is not perceived as an attack on any particular group or our beloved school; rather as a university-wide goal which seeks to address a problem we simply do not have the means to achieve alone, because it requires assistance from all of the WSU community. We are proud to be a part of such an excellent institution, and with the “cost reduction initiative,” ASWSU hopes to improve the welfare of students for years to come.
C. Student Success image, Florida Virtual Campus
There is a direct relationship between textbook costs and student success

60%+ do not purchase textbooks at some point due to cost

50% take fewer courses due to textbook cost

31% choose not to register for a course due to textbook cost

23% regularly go without textbooks due to cost

14% have dropped a course due to textbook cost

10% have withdrawn from a course due to textbook cost

Source: 2012 student survey by Florida Virtual Campus
D. WSU Vancouver Student Poll
Would you pay a Open Material fee ($5-7) for a course, if the professor used open material (textbook would be online and cost $0)?

(134 responses)

If course sections using open materials were clearly marked in the course listings at registration time, would you choose open materials courses over other traditional textbook options?

(134 responses)
E. WSU Vancouver Open Textbook Math Efforts
WSU Vancouver Open Textbook Math Efforts

Open textbooks are a particularly good fit for math classes. Textbooks are often very expensive, and the nature of most math courses is that students who delay purchase of the textbooks often fall hopelessly behind. Math courses are also often gateway courses – they are taken by a large portion of our students, and must be successfully completed for students to continue on their chosen academic path.

Lumen Learning Pilot

In Fall of 2013, Washington State University Vancouver signed on to a Gates Foundation funded pilot to see if a paid support + open materials combination could address some historical problems with open materials use.

Under the terms of the pilot, Lumen Learning trained selected faculty to use and extend open educational resources in their classroom, as well as provided some basic technical integration and support. Normally these services would have cost money (Lumen charges about $5 a student for training, support, and integration) but under the pilot these fees were waived (paid by the Gates Foundation). The grant also provided Washington State with $5,000 to stipend faculty working to integrate and assess the materials.

The pilot focused on Math 106, and involved the integration of the MyOpenMath product into the course. The initial semester involved one section, but this was broadened to three sections in the Fall and currently all sections of 106 are taught using MyOpenMath.

Results were overwhelmingly positive. In fact, the initial faculty assigned to the pilot became such an evangelist for the tool and method that she ended up applying for and accepting a job at Lumen Learning, where she now oversees open textbook implementations for math. The students were appreciative of the extra tool, and though we did not have enough students to do a true experiment, did moderately better.

This year we broadened the use of the tool to include all sections of Math 108, with the help of instructor Frank McGrade who integrated 108 with the tool in summer 2015 and put out a startup guide for other instructors. We are looking at the possibility of extending its use into Math 103 and Math 105, and are currently evaluating sustainability options for the maintenance, integration, and care of these courses. Lumen’s grant-funded support contract ran out a year ago, but they have been providing occasional free support. No costs were borne either by the students or university.

We don’t have a firm estimate on how much money we’ve saved students with this project, but a comparable textbook + MyMathLab bundle costs about $200. Even if we discount that text and estimate a savings of $150 a student and multiply that by the number of students that have gone through the courses (two and a half years of students in Math 106 and one year of Math 108) we’ve saved students about $40,000 already, and as we broaden use to other courses we should see these savings accelerate.
Other Math Efforts

Our Math Faculty here looked at MyOpenMath and other Lumen offerings for other courses and found they didn’t quite fit, but have had good success adopting open textbooks in other courses.

Math 301 and Math 320 use open textbooks and Math 315 uses a closed textbook for which the author has made a draft copy available online for free. We are also looking at adopting the OpenStax Calculus textbook series for our Calculus efforts here, and Lumen has also just released a new Calculus series as well, based on the OpenStax work.

These options did not include digital tools, and were not tracked as closely, but saved our students a lot of money. More importantly, we believe that because they ensured all our students had the textbook on day one that they may have favorably impacted student success as well.

Paul Krouss, the former head of our math efforts here, says there’s a lot of open textbook activity going on in Pullman as well, but it is maybe a bit less systemic and visible, due to challenges of scale. We’ve had the luxury of a small program where adopting a textbook across all class sections involves talking to two or three people at most. That gets harder as scale increases.

Appendix One: Abbreviated Project Kaleidoscope Statement of Work

The pilot is designed to achieve the following objectives for the pilot institution:

1. Define a sustaining economic model individualized for each institution that addresses the specific mission, financial and political needs of the institution.
2. Support faculty to achieve improved student success.
3. Complete program evaluation of pilot efforts.
4. Define a scaling plan to increase impact in alignment with institutional goals.

1) Lumen Services. Lumen will provide the following services under the terms of this agreement:

Program Planning

- Facilitate an on-site strategy session with leadership to adapt the Kaleidoscope approach to institutional strategies, budget and organizations
  - Define the economic model that will sustain the project over time
  - Define metrics to evaluate program success
  - Create communications documents for key constituents
  - Create a program evaluation plan Faculty Support
- Provide on-site faculty training that engages faculty in the Kaleidoscope approach
  - With faculty and leadership, identify institutional customizations and enhancements to the Kaleidoscope approach and plans
  - Refine institutional plans based on faculty input
- Provide support for faculty members using Kaleidoscope course designs
  - Complete a review of Kaleidoscope course materials with faculty members
  - Adapt course materials to align with faculty teaching preferences
• Define and execute faculty support preferences throughout the term
• Following analysis, present faculty with concrete recommendations to improve the course designs that align with the faculty approach
• Support use of the technology—Provide faculty members with training and support to effectively deliver the course using the technology
  • Provide tier 2 support for the institutional help desk to address student issues
  • Provide tier 1 support for faculty members, providing a single contact who can address questions of administration and technology for the Kaleidoscope course.
• Create appropriate connections to the Kaleidoscope community
  • Facilitate engagement with Kaleidoscope cross-institutional faculty teams
  • Share course design enhancements with the Kaleidoscope community

Program Evaluation

• Collect evaluation data
• Present a pilot evaluation report to the institutional leadership team
• Based on program results, recommend a plan to increase positive participation and impact to the pilot institution

2) The Institution agrees to do the following:

• Identify a senior academic leader who will act as the executive sponsor
• Identify two to six faculty members who will participate in training and will pilot the Kaleidoscope courses with a minimum of 120 students during the pilot timeframe.
• Use the Lumen platform (Instructure Canvas) for delivery of the pilot course materials and assessments.
• Provide de-identified student success and persistence data for evaluation, research, and reporting.
• Complete an institutional survey (one for the Institution), a faculty survey (one for each faculty member), and provide a student survey to all participating students.
• License course materials and enhancements using a Creative Commons Attribution license.
• Allow Lumen and the Kaleidoscope community to announce the Institution’s participation in Kaleidoscope.

Appendix Two: Sources for Open Textbooks for Math

There are many available texts for math courses. Here’s some places to look for a math textbook for the math or stats classroom.

In addition to open textbooks, there are many open tools to help students practice and master mathematics and statistics, but here we’ll just list textbooks.

Lumen Learning Courses. These are open courses, usually based on works put together by others but packaged together for a smoother implementation. The lower level courses also have digital homework tools; unsure if the newer offerings do as well (e.g. Calculus, etc.)
OpenStax College. These are a series of books commissioned and produced by Rice. To make replacement of existing “closed” textbooks easy they mimic competing products closely, and even have low-cost physical books available for purchase — usually at about 30% of what your average new textbook would cost. The digital versions are, of course, always free.

BC Campus. British Columbia is fast becoming the leader in open textbook adoption, by virtue of a province-wide effort to evaluate, adopt, and extend open textbooks. Like many efforts, they run a local repository of open textbooks, but somewhat uniquely, they publicly share the faculty reviews of the textbooks provided by faculty in the project (here’s an example), and show when a BC campus (UBC, Simon Fraser, Thompson Rivers, etc) has actually adopted a book for use in a course. This helps greatly in sorting the bad from the good. This recent effort started a couple years ago, but is already paying remarkable dividends.

BC Campus is a model we might think about in Washington, given the collaborative infrastructure put in place already by the community college system.

Open Textbook Library. There are many online indexes to open textbooks hosted by individual universities, with different strengths and weaknesses. The University of Minnesota’s Open Textbook Library does not have as much information about texts as BC Campus, but it is one of the better maintained lists, and they have a number of unique and niche options listed under mathematics, including a Calculus textbook by Gilbert Strang that can be paired with his MIT OCW lectures.
F. Text book costs for high enrollment lower division courses
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Total spent by students/Fall: 19143
Average per enrollment $117.00
Average per course $97,983.86
G. OER resources for seven large enrollment, high cost 100 level courses
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